



Sailors and NY Jets Together Bring Hope to Children

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NEW YORK – Sailors in New York City for Fleet Week New York City 2007 participated in the community relations (COMREL) event—Project Hope—along with members of the New York Jets professional football team, on May 26 at Times Square Church in Manhattan.

Project Hope, a church-sponsored organization that provides resources, counseling and food to inner-city children and their families, invited the Sailors as well as the New York Jets to meet with those they serve.

Neil Rhodes, pastor at Times Square Church, said the military's presence was a tremendous advantage for the kids.

"I think this will leave a positive mark on the kids' minds for years to come," said Rhodes. "These children don't often have a role model to look up to, and having the Sailors come to visit them, talk with them and make them feel important . . . I can't describe how much this will impact their lives."

"I hope the Sailors know in their hearts that they did some good here today," the pastor added.

During the day's events, the families enjoyed a buffet lunch with the Sailors and football players. The pro athletes gave autographs throughout the afternoon and guests were entertained with a skit, performed by Project Hope church members.

One football player said the combination of the military and the pro athletes was a great way to boost morale to the kids.

Rob Turner, New York Jets left guard, said, "a lot of children grow up playing 'soldier' or playing 'football hero' in their back-yard, so this is a great way to let them see that their dreams can become a reality."

Capt. Dale Parker, Chaplain, Mid-Atlantic Region Norfolk, Va., added that the impact of the day goes beyond the kids meeting their heroes.

"The Sailors had an opportunity to bless some kids and give them a sense that they are significant," he said. "They had a part in letting these children feel hope that their lives are purposeful and they also can be a positive role-model to some young child one day."

Turner echoed the Chaplain's thoughts and said, "the name [Project Hope] speaks for itself. Events like this will show the kids that, with a little help and a lot of hard work, they can make it."

Ludwin Salazar, USS Wasp Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Fuels) 3rd Class, said participating in this event is the highlight of his trip to New York thus far.

"I don't think anything can top this," said Salazar. "I hope to leave feeling that we've shown New York what a great and strong a Navy we are and they'll continue to have pride in being an American."

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